1. Introduction

Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) → Seminal article on the status of agreement in Chichewa

Keach (1995) → Applied B&M’s methodology to varieties of Swahili, concluding that SA in Swahili behaves both as agreement as well as pronoun.

Zwart (1997) → Argues essentially for an auxiliary analysis of the T marker, and then suggests that SA is a pronoun cliticized to the auxiliary verb.

I argue against the pronominal analysis of subject agreement.

(1)a. Agreement Analysis

(1)b. Pronominal Analysis

(2) Kibaki a – li – shind – a
Kibaki SA3s – past – win – IND
‘Kibaki won.’
Agreement Analysis: subject agreement – tense – verb – mood

Pronominal Analysis topic subject – tense – verb – mood

2. Keach (1995)

Keach has three analyses that have conflicting results:
(i) HU-tense marker
(ii) Subject wh- questions
(iii) Idioms

2.1 HU-Tense marker

(3) a. watu wa Kenya, wa i – na – wa – pend – a watoto
   people of Kenya, SA_{3pl}-pres-OA_{3pl}-like-IND children
   ‘People of Kenya like children’

   b. wa i – na – wa – pend – a watoto watu wa Kenya
   SA_{3pl}-pres-OA_{3pl}-like-IND children people of Kenya
   ‘(They) like children, people of Kenya’

   c. watu wa Kenyani, ni – na – fikir - i kuwa wa i – na – wa – pend – a watoto
   people of Kenya SA_{1s}-pres-think-IND that SA_{3pl}-pres-OA_{3pl}-like-IND children
   ‘People of Kenya, I think that, (they) like children.’

According to Keach, these examples are compatible with both a pronominal and an agreement analysis. Under the agreement analysis, agreement occurs before movement, and then the subject DP is moved leftward or rightward as normal. Under a pronominal analysis theta role assignment occurs directly to SA, and is then transmitted through a chain to the overt DP.
In Habitual HU-clauses, SA is obligatorily absent:

(4)  
\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{a. Watu wa Kenya hu - wa – pend – a watoto} \\
&\text{people of Kenya hab-OA3pl- like - IND children} \\
&\text{‘People of Kenya like children’}
\end{align*}
\]

b. *Watu wa Kenya wa - hu - wa – pend – a watoto \\
people of Kenya SA3pl-hab-OA3pl- like - IND children \\
‘People of Kenya like children’

In HU-clauses, where SA is absent, postverbal subjects and the raising of subject to matrix topic position are ungrammatical as illustrated in examples (5a,b):

(5)a. * Hu – wa – pend – a watoto, watu wa Kenya \\
hab-OA3pl- like - IND children people of Kenya \\
‘like children, people of Kenya’

people of Kenya SA1s-pres-think-IND that hab-OA3pl- like - IND children \\
‘People of Kenya, I think that, like children’

2.2 Subject Wh- Questions

Principles from Bresnan & Mchombo (1987), used by Keach (1995):

(6)  
\[
\begin{align*}
i. \ &\text{Relative pronouns bear TOPIC function;} \\
ii. \ &\text{Questioned constituents bear FOCUS function;} \\
iii. \ &\text{An argument cannot bear both TOP and FOC function in the same clause.}
\end{align*}
\]

Swahili subject wh-questions:

(7) nani a; – me –end–a ? \\
who SA3s-prf-go-IND \\
who has gone?

2.3 Idioms

(8)  
\[
\begin{align*}
a. \ &\text{Ni – li – fikir - i kuwa mtindi u - me – va - a Asha} \\
&\text{SA1s-past-think-IND that brew SA3-pr.prf.-wear-IND Asha} \\
&\text{‘I thought that Asha is drunk’} \\
&(\text{lit: I thought that the brew has covered Asha})
\end{align*}
\]
3. **Additional arguments against a pronominal analysis**

3.1 **Quantification**

If SA is a pronominal subject, then the lexical overt subject must be a topic. One property of topics is that they cannot be quantifiers (Lasnik & Stowell, 1991; Rizzi, 1992):

(9) a. I did everything  
   b. *Everything, I did (it)

(10) a. Nothing is impossible  
   b. *Nothing, (it) is impossible

In Swahili, this restriction also holds. In (10a), the object (*kila kitu*) is in object position, and is ungrammatical when topicalized, as in (10b).

(11) a. a – li – nunu – a kila kitabu  
       SA₃₅–past–buy–IND every book  
       ‘She bought every book’

   b. *kila kitabu, a – li – (ki)–nunu– a [t]  
      every thing SA₃₅–past–(OA₇)–buy–IND [t]  
      ‘Every book, she bought’

Under a pronominal analysis of SA, the preverbal DP is in topic position, and so a quantifier should be ungrammatical, contra to fact:

(12) a. kila mtoto a – li – nunu – a ki – tabu  
       ‘Every child bought a book.’

   b. kila ki–tabu ki – li – nunuli – w – a na mtoto  
      ‘Every book was bought by a child.’

   Brew SA₁₃–past-think–IND that SA₃–prf.–wear–IND Asha  
   (lit: (As for) the brew, I thought that it has covered Asha)
3.2 Answer to question

The answer to a question cannot be a topic:

(13) a. Who arrived early?
b. ?? As for John, he arrived early
c. John arrived early

In Swahili, the preverbal DP can be the answer to a question:

(14) a. nani a – li – fik – a mapema 
   who SA₃s–past–arrive–IND early
   ‘Who arrived early?’

b. ?? Juma, a – li – fik – a mapema
   Juma, SA₃s–past–arrive–IND early
   ‘Juma, he arrived early.’

c. Juma a – li – fik – a mapema
   Juma SA₃s–past–arrive–IND early
   ‘Juma arrived early.’

3.3 Typology of agreement and clitics

Among the languages of the Takic family, SA has been particularly well-studied in four languages: Luiseño, Cupeño, Serrano, and Cahuilla. In Luiseño, the unmarked word order is shown in (15a) (examples are from Steele, 1995), where the clitic (up) is in second position following the subject (hengeemal):

(15) a. hengeemal up heyiq Subject-clitic-verb
    boy 3sg is:digging
    ‘The boy is digging’

    b. heyiq up hengeemal Verb-clitic-subject
    is:digging 3sg boy
    ‘The boy is digging’

    c. * hengeemal heyiq up Subject-verb-clitic
    boy is:digging 3sg
In (15a), the unmarked order is subject-clitic-verb. According to Steele (1995, p.1227), (15b) with the verb preceding the clitic is semantically non-distinct from (15a). (15c) – where the clitic sequence is not second – is ungrammatical. This is also true of two of the other three most well-studied languages: Cupéño and Serrano. Thus the order of the clitic and verb is free, provided the clitic is in second position. However, Cahuilla, has a set of bound pronominal elements that are obligatorily preverbal. Thus the order clitic-verb is grammatical, but verb-clitic is ungrammatical irrespective of whether the clitic is in second position or not. These clitics are “generally taken to be prefixes rather than (pronouns)” (Steele, 1995, p.1227)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Why did Keach find ambiguous results?
Several possibilities:  
- Multiple sources
- Multiple dialects

Why are there no ambiguous results here?
- A single dialect (as best as can be determined)
- A somewhat newer and authentic variety of Swahili than Kiswahili Sanifu

What is happening in Swahili such that there is such a debate?

References


